

## SPECIAL REPORT

### HIGH LEVELS OF HOSTILITY AGAINST JOURNALISTS AND THE MEDIA DURING THE FIRST QUARTER OF THE YEAR

During the first quarter of the year, in the period between January and March 2012, FUNDAMEDIOS' Network to Monitor Threats against Press Freedom registered a **total of 53** aggressions against the media, journalists and members of the public who were exercising their right to the freedom of expression.

Year	January	February	March	Total
2009	7	5	9	21
2010	8	11	15	34
2011	12	15	15	42
2012	13	22	18	53

This figure is evidence of a substantial increase in aggressiveness against media professionals and establishes the first quarter of this year as the most violent, compared to previous ones, during which the Network registered in the same time period 21 attacks in 2009, 34 in 2010 and 42 in 2011.

The data show that the most frequent types of aggression in this first quarter were **statements made by officials and public figures**, accounting for 16.98%, followed by **impairment of coverage**, accounting for 15.09%.

Therefore, the main aggressors during this first quarter of the year were **public officials** accounting for 56.6% of aggressions. The President of the Republic initiated 20.75% of the attacks, while 15% include aggressions from **unions, civil associations, violent groups, mobs, political supporters or protesters**.

In this context, the Network reported cases of intimidation by public officials and an increase of the stigmatizing discourse against the media by the Executive, despite the pardon announced during the most emblematic legal processes, i.e. against El Universo and journalists Juan Carlos Calderon and Christian Zurita.

We should highlight that several of the attacks brought on by these groups took place within the framework of the hearing for the review of facts in the El Universo case. This is why February had the greatest number of aggressions, a total of 22 cases, followed by March with 18 and January with 13.

As for those who were attacked, FUNDAMEDIOS verified that **radio, written press and television journalists** were the most affected, -38% of cases-, followed by **the media**-25% -.

A great part of the reported attacks occurred because, during these three months, two landmark judgments were issued that affected the country's freedom of expression. The first one against journalists Juan Carlos Calderón and Christian Zurita, authors of the book *El Gran Hermano*, and the second against the directors of the newspaper El Universo. Both originated from lawsuits filed by President Rafael Correa.

On 16 February, the day the appeal in the El Universo case took place, FUNDAMEDIOS reported a series of physical attacks and coverage constraints suffered by journalists.

In March there were some moments of high political tension as the "March for life and dignity" took place, with indigenous and opposition groups walking from several provinces to the capital, over 14 days, to express their rejection of some government policies. In response, the Executive called on its supporters so that on 22 March – the day the march would arrive - they would go out onto the streets of Quito to defend the regime's stability.

The Network reported several coverage constraints, which affected both government and private media, during the course of the indigenous march. For example, on 19 March journalist Máximo Barba, a correspondent for Ecuador TV in Ambato (136 km south of Quito) was physically attacked and prevented from covering the march as it went through that city (Alert No. 444).

In another incident, on 20 March, private media journalists were prevented from covering the signing of an agreement in the presidential palace and one of the reporters was then verbally attacked by government sympathizers in the vicinity of Independence Square, in Quito's historical center (Alert No. 445).

Between January and March, the Network reported mostly alerts about coverage constraints. There were also cases of journalists who were threatened and intimidated, and cases where State communication tools, such as '*cadenas*', were used to refute comments or clarify what the government considers "lies of the corrupt press".

For example, on 17 January, in the province of El Oro, journalists Hubel and Alcibiades Onofre, correspondents of two TV stations that were seized by the government (Gama TV and TC), were verbally attacked and threatened by unidentified persons after they broadcasted a piece about the sentimental relationship between a woman accused of being the intellectual author of a triple murder and Assembly member Galo Lara (Alert No. 411).

Regarding the use of '*cadena*' and other State communication tools, on 21 and 24 January 2012, the government broadcasted two videos to discredit Teleamazonas TV station journalist Fausto Yépez because of an investigation about spying operations carried out from the Ministry of Justice and State ministers' security (Alert No. 414).

Also, on 27 March, a radio '*cadena*' ordered by the National Communication Department (SECOM) interrupted radio station Democracia – Exa FM's informative magazine to refute the comments and information presented in that program, as well as questioning the station's journalistic work (Alert No. 448).

As antecedent to this case, we should mention that on 22 March, the National Communication Secretary, Fernando Alvarado, interrupted with a phone call a Radio Democracia interview program to report and "clarify a lie" about the Communication Bill, as well as to demand more respect in the use of a public good (Alert No. 447).

